

TICK PARALYSIS

What is tick paralysis?

Tick paralysis is a disease caused by the bite of a tick. When a tick feeds on a person or animal, a chemical in its saliva is released that inhibits the normal function of nerves and muscles.

How do you get tick paralysis?

A tick must be attached to the skin and feeding for tick paralysis to occur. Many tick species are capable of causing tick paralysis. In the United States, most cases occur in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain states following the bite of the Rocky Mountain wood tick. In the eastern and southern states, other tick species, including the American dog tick, the Lone Star tick, the Gulf Coast tick, and occasionally the deer tick, have been associated with human cases. The condition often occurs in children less than eight years old; however, anyone bitten by ticks can be at risk.

What are the symptoms of tick paralysis?

The first symptom is weakness in the arms and legs, two to seven days following a tick bite. Hours to days later, patients become unable to move their arms and legs. If not treated, patients may become unable to speak or even breathe. How badly a person is affected depends on the number of ticks and how long they remain attached. Tick paralysis is fatal in about ten percent of untreated patients. Tick paralysis can resemble other infectious and noninfectious disorders of the nervous system (e.g., botulism).

How is tick paralysis treated?

Locating and removing the attached tick(s) is the only necessary treatment. Ticks are often found attached on the scalp, particularly at the hairline. In most cases, normal muscle function returns within hours of removing the tick.

How can I prevent tick paralysis?

The risk of tick paralysis, as well as other diseases transmitted by ticks, can be reduced by taking appropriate precautions to avoid tick bites. If possible, avoid areas where ticks are known to occur. When in these areas, wear light-colored long pants and long sleeve shirts. Repellants applied to clothing can further deter ticks from attaching. When outdoor activities are completed, thoroughly examine yourself and promptly remove any ticks that may be attached.

Where can I find more information on tick paralysis?

The American Lyme Disease Foundation has information available on their website <http://www.aldf.com/TickParalysis.asp>.